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ABSTRACT

This paper considers how Australian young people living in relative poverty, per se, are portrayed in media reports and how a specific group of socioeconomically disadvantaged young people are constituted in teachers' classroom talk. The paper begins with the examination of several newspaper reports, part of an archive of articles concerned with young people, disadvantaged schools, and literacy. It then discusses teachers' discursive practices in literacy lessons and offers an analytic framework for investigating teacher talk from a Foucauldian perspective, with power as productive and discourse as constitutive. The discussion in the paper stems from 18 months observation in 4 classrooms during literacy lessons in 1 disadvantaged school and explores normative discursive practices where teachers exercise power in managing the class to be made literate. The focus is on the impact of macro discourses upon what teachers say and do and how they constitute "the student" in the local, micro everyday institutional practices of schooling. (Contains 4 figures, a table, and 26 references.) (NKA)

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Literacy, contingency and room to move: Researching 'normativity' and 'spaces of freedom' in classrooms

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as part of a symposium:

Under construction: (Re)presenting the student (dis)position

chaired by Dr Trevor Gale Central Queensland University

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> People know what they do; they frequently know why they do what they do; but what they don't know is what they do does. (Foucault, quoted in Dreyfus & Rabinow 1983, p.187)

Literacy (and the supposed lack of it), its relationship to young people and public schooling has become a matter for public concern, and that concern is frequently invested with overtones of moral panic (Green et al. 1994). At particular historical moments and in particular locations, different ideologies, such as human capital, managerialism, Christianity or scientific progress, inform the ways in which literacy is understood and how it is thought to relate to the constitution of the student subject. While a version of the literate subject may predominate at any one time and place, other versions are not erased. Teachers' constructions of the ideal literate subject are likely to be informed by competing discourses and ideologies. For teachers, the literacy lesson may simultaneously be a site for moral training, for the rescue of the disadvantaged child and/or for skilling the child worker.

In this paper, I consider how young people living in relative poverty, *per se*, are portrayed in media reports and how a specific group of socio-economically disadvantaged young people are constituted in teachers' classroom talk. I begin by examining several newspaper reports, part of an archive of articles concerned with young people, disadvantaged schools and literacy. I then discuss teachers' discursive practices in literacy lessons and offer an analytic framework for investigating teacher talk from a Foucauldian perspective, with power as productive and discourse as constitutive. My interest is in the impact of macro discourses upon what teachers say and do and how they constitute 'the student', in the local, micro everyday institutional practices of schooling.

'Schools under siege': From where? From what? From whom?

Teachers often feature in the news when their actions are thought to make a difference to students or parents (Baker 1994). For example, reports of teacher strikes and unionism appear regularly. Teacher refusals to enact government policies, such as mandatory testing, are also common topics, especially in recent times. Teacher failure to produce the kinds of citizens society wants is the overarching, frequently recycled theme. In addition, the press gives considerable attention to stories of suspected teacher deviance or criminality. The print media 'shape the picture the public has of schools' (Baker 1994, p.287). This in turn contributes to what can be said about schools and teachers in the communities which has effects on teacher morale and status.

In South Australia, school education made the front page a number of times during the nineties. During a six-month period in 1992 the following headlines featured in the state's only daily newspaper, *The Advertiser*:

- School under siege (February 20, p.1)
- School under siege as teachers 'crack' (February 20, p.2)
- Schools crisis: teachers to rally (February 21, p.2)
- SA education needs funds, not rhetoric (February 21, Editorial Opinion, p.10)

- Employers slam school training (July 14, p.1)
- Employers lash out at school training (July 14, p.2)

The net results of such journalism produce a decline in teachers' public status and low morale at a time when the intensification and complexity of teachers' work is escalating (Comber 1997). Metaphors associated with aggression and violence are common, including 'siege' and 'slam'. Accompanying these articles are photographs and cartoons which drive the messages home. *The Advertiser* cartoonist has taken a similar line over several years in regard to schooling, by using the 'three R's' as the starting point in most of the material relating to schooling.

The front page story, entitled 'School Under Siege', reports teachers' inability to cope with the 'escalating violence and severe behaviour problems' amongst students at one northern suburbs disadvantaged school.

[insert figure 1 here]

On either side of the article are two photographs, one of the female school principal and a large photograph of a classroom with a smashed window panel on the classroom door. Partially covering the large cracks is a sign, 'Welcome to Class RM 4'. The report goes on to describe violence between students and towards teachers in this primary school. The school principal ascribes blame to the economic recession and inadequate levels of staffing. The story of 'one experienced and skilled' teacher's breakdown is told. The photograph of the classroom has been taken from outside the classroom through the cracked glass of the door. Because the glass is reinforced with a metallic grid the effect of the photograph is to give the appearance of a cage. The children in the classroom look as though they are behind bars or a wire enclosure. The article on the other side of the photograph reports on the escape of a high security prisoner from an escort vehicle whilst on his way to a court appearance.

As Kress (1994) has argued, where the boundaries for texts begin and end in newspaper reportage is not clear. The overall effect of this front page is to place the problem school and its prison-like environment next to a report about a violent criminal. The story of the violent and dangerous adult criminal are placed together with those about children who punch their teachers, who threaten them with chairs and whose teachers need police assistance to maintain control. The story also tells of a teacher who cracked the glass panel in the door by slamming it in her frustration. These re-iterations of the violence theme – the students, the prisoners, the teachers – constitute the young people and their teachers as members of another dangerous world. On page two next to the continued story headed, 'School under siege as teachers "crack"', the cartoonist shows two student figures talking to each other. The ballooned script from one reads: 'We learnt the 3R's today...reading rioting and wrecking!'

[insert figure 2 here]

The article itself devotes considerable space to the principal's claims that the economic recession has produced 'a hard core of violent and disruptive children' who require extra staffing in order to manage them. She also points out that despite their behaviour management policies and plans, that the high turn-over of teachers in her school, means that there is insufficient training for the teachers, who come into the school and suffer a kind of 'culture shock' at the high level of trauma in children's family lives. While the principal's views – that the high levels of poverty are producing suffering and violence – are represented here, the visual images and headlines convey images of teachers not coping with out of control children.

The article continues with a statement from a Department of Education spokeswoman who claims the school already receives eighteen percent extra funding on top of the regular staff allocation. This perspective is highlighted the following day when the 'schools crisis', and indeed this particular school, again feature on the second and editorial pages. Tnis time the accompanying photographs feature two men, the new director general of education who is due to take up his position a week later and a heavily tattooed parent who helps out at the school voluntarily. On this occasion the main article is headed, 'Schools crisis: teachers to rally'.

[insert figure 3 here]

After a brief description of the support the principal has received in response to the article published the previous day's , the journalist reports the Opposition Leader's statement that four thousand children from the northern arẽa were waiting for places in private schools because of the 'falling standards of education in the area'. Next the article moves to a response from the future South Australia Director General of Education, Dr Eric Wilmott, who explains he would be out at the school himself, except that he has not formally taken up his new position. This does not prevent Dr Wilmott from stating that 'pouring in more staff would not in itself solve the problem'. Next a series of interviews with male politicians is reported. Adjacent to this report is the photo of the parent, Bill Wade, leaning over two male children, one of whom is Aboriginal.

[insert figure 4 here]

The subheading reads: 'Mr Hulk calms kids with art'. In this article this parent member of the Elizabeth Field's community is described as a 'local hero' who uses art as an antidote to depression and anger. The article concludes with a quotation from Mr Wade, 'If I could get a job here, I would be happy as a pig in crap'. Multiple constructions of schooling, disadvantage, teaching, and parenting compete across these newspaper accounts. Political, economic and professional discourses are set side by side. However some messages come through very clearly. Children in

disadvantaged schools are portrayed as out of control. Women teachers who work in disadvantaged schools are constituted as not coping, as 'cracking up' (even though as the official discourse claims they have been provided with more than adequate support). A commonsense reading may suggest that if a parent helper can 'calm kids with art' why are the professional women teachers 'cracking up'? Whose problem is it?

Since that time, *The Advertiser* has featured many articles focussing on disadvantaged schools, with similar undermining of public schooling, suggestions that poor parents 'rort' the system and claims that levels of literacy are low. Headlines of articles collected later in 1992 and into 1993, illustrate the dominant discourses regarding literacy in the press at that time:

- Young readers, writers 'just make grade' (*The Advertiser*, 28 July 28, 1992, p.3)
- Literacy problems a barrier to output (*The Australian*, 2 August, 1992, p.57)
- Poor literacy costs $6.5 bn, bosses told (*The Advertiser*, 28 January, 1993, p. 8)
- Primary students literacy slammed (*The Advertiser*, 3 February, 1993, p. 6)
- Schools to focus on literacy skills (*The Advertiser*, 25 October, 1993, p. 10)

In this period the literate subject becomes the economic subject, the human resource whilst still being constituted as deficit (Green et al.1994),. At the same time even positive findings concerning standards of literacy were reported negatively, as in the case of 'Young readers, writers just make the grade' and 'Literacy test attacked as a publicity stunt anyone can pass'. By these accounts literacy remains a problem.

The cartoon accompanying 'Primary students literacy slammed', reads 'We learnt our ACB in school today', suggesting that even the commonsense basics are beyond today's schools. 'Slam' is a key verb when it comes to the performance of schools. Headlines such as 'Employers slam school training' and 'Primary students literacy slammed' position schools and teachers as the deserving victims of more expert critique. Teachers are constructed as incapable of producing the kinds of literate workers Australia needs. In addition many of the articles press home the ways in which schools continue to fail students or produce disadvantage through inadequate teaching.

There are success stories printed in the press, but careful scrutiny of such accounts is needed in terms of who is represented and what is reported (see Nixon, 1998). The children of the bad news stories are constructed as victims or threats and as hailing from the poorer working class suburbs or as homeless. The 'clever' children are computer whiz kids, scrabble champions, solar power inventors, maths prodigies, and sporting heroes often from private schools or those state schools with a reputation for academic success, and often from the 'leafy suburbs'. In these ways, the press divides the population of children into success and failures, 'saints or sinners' (Walton 1993).

The effects of print media discourses on readers, or teacher readers for that matter, are not possible to gauge. However, newspapers do contribute to the production of available public discourses on a range of community concerns. They are one major way in which government policies in social services and education are mediated and made accessible in a society. Thus print media reportage on topics such as schooling, young people, literacy, poverty and teachers, contributes to the available cultural

resources and commonsense knowledges about the way things are. When it comes to poor communities, the media sustains and perpetuates a view of the 'problem child', to be both pitied and feared. When it comes to schooling, teachers and literacy, the print media sustains and perpetuates the view that there is a literacy crisis and that the quality of public school teaching is poor. In terms of the local effects of such discursive practices on teachers working in disadvantaged schools one can only speculate. What can be said though is that such messages do nothing to support teachers' work. Rather, cumulatively, a powerful negative public subjectivity is constructed (Green et al. 1994).

Media reports cannot be simply dismissed as wrong or conservative right wing backlash; such texts are instrumental in maintaining a managerial discourse of accountability and the dominance of human capital ideology. Further, media attention to youth crime or literacy crises swings the focus away from the structural and economic causes of social problems. The response becomes one of increased surveillance, examination and training for the designated problem population, rather than a redistribution of resources.

At the same time as the media does its complex work around youth, poverty, literacy educational standards, official governmental and educational discourses are also at work to produce the truth about these matters. Elsewhere I have discussed how literacy, teaching and disadvantage were constituted in educational policy during the early nineties (Comber 1996), here I simply note the federal Labour Government's distinct emphasis on *quality*, informed by a human capital ideology (Knight et al. 1994; Marginson 1993), and ideology which pervaded the development of the first national literacy policy and the Schools Council review of teaching, both undertaken in the early nineties. At the same time as the government began to stress enhanced outcomes, competencies and doing more with less, there was a concomitant reduction in overt statements on poverty and social justice. The point to note here is the discursive (mine)field under construction at this time in terms of public schooling, disadvantaged youth, literacy and teachers.

Reconstituting the disadvantaged child as the literate self-regulated worker

Teachers draw on not only their professional knowledge, but also upon wider societal discourses about young people, employment, families and so on. Elsewhere I have discussed how teacher formations of the disadvantaged student subject can be dangerous when young people are subjected to a multiplicity of expert and popularist discourses, culminating in a surfeit of deficits, which permeates teacher perceptions and decision-making (Comber 1997; in press, 1998). Literacy curricula and programs, characterised by bricolage and pastiche; political statements about conspiracies of silence and lies in regards to literacy standards; media pronouncements about the truth of illiteracy; and academic squabbles over pedagogies and curricula, ensure that the literacy classroom becomes a highly contested site and the literate student as contingent and cumulative. So what do teachers do with all this? What impact do the macro discourses have on everyday practices? How are they deployed, taken up, altered, contested in specific sites? I do not mean to suggest any simple deterministic

relationship between the macro and the micro; rather, following Foucault, I argue that power is exercised in capillary fashion in local networks of practices.

The analysis which follows is based upon eighteen months observation in four classrooms during literacy lessons in one disadvantaged school (the same period for which I collected the press articles). I explore normative discursive practices where teachers exercise power in managing the class to be made literate (Fairclough 1992). During my observations, I noted that teachers employed a repertoire of discursive techniques designed to keep students on task and to produce the ideal student. I have named these: voice-over, pep talks and on patrol. These techniques were often used as a cumulative strategy. Voice-over is what teachers say while students work. Pep talks are what teachers say to students about how students should be. Teacher on patrol is the individualised checking teachers do during literacy lessons. Table 1 provides a summary and examples of these techniques.

Table 1 Discursive techniques to produce the ideal student

Technique	Definition	Examples
Voice-over	What teachers say while students work	'That's not how we normally work' 'You're on task straight away' 'I'm finding your noise level too high' 'Focus on journal please' 'Some lovely quiet workers'
Pep talks	What teachers say about students to students	'Some people have cleaned up beautifully' 'So you know deep down inside what your responsibilities are' 'When I saw you were a bit sloppy at the end of the day you were forgiven' 'Because we are looking at working together'
On patrol	Individualised checking of students	'This shouldn't be in your journal' 'Adam have you started work?' 'It's not drawing time Daniel, it's writing time.' 'Adrianna, are you on task?'

I see these discursive techniques as normalising practices because they make explicit the teachers' norms for classroom behaviours – where students should be, where their bodies should be, when and how they can speak, what they should be doing, how they should be doing it and how they should be using their time. My observations suggest that such practices are not part of teachers' unique styles, but available resources within the institutionalised repertoires of schooling.

Voice-over: A reminder of what you should be (doing)

Voice-over refers to the running commentary produced by teachers after students begin the set task. To illustrate: the teacher has given the instruction about what students are to do, how they are to do it, and how long they have to do it. The students return to their seats and engage in all manner of activities from doing exactly as they are told, chatting, organising books and so on. At this point, and in fact any time whilst students are supposedly engaged in independent work, teachers make statements to the class. These statements may include reminders, additions, clarifications, comments on student behaviour, comments on student products. Students are usually free to stay at their seats and to keep going about their set tasks, unlike other kinds of teacher talk, which does not proceed without eye-contact,

silence and pens down; in fact its object is to keep students in their seats and keep them on task.

I call this form of teacher talk voice-over because it runs over the top, as it were, of the other activity that has already been put in place, and provides a meta-commentary upon it. Here the teacher, a little like the sporting commentator, tells the audience what it is they can see. In this instance however the audience are also the participants; hence the analogy falls short. However it is suggestive of the kind of talk which occurs. If the voice-over does not produce the required result it can easily be transformed into other forms of discipline. I discuss voice-over as occasions of specific kinds of discursive practice constitutive of student subjectivity. Examples from one lesson follow.

Teacher — Look at this wonderful table here - organised straight away - excellent.

Several minutes later same lesson

Teacher — You're on task aren't you this morning. Excellent. Come on Kirsty and Leona.

Several minutes later same lesson

Teacher — We've got about five more minutes left before we need to be organised.

Several minutes later same lesson

Teacher — Right Jasmine and Scott how are you going there? I'm going to come and see what you're doing in a minute. Great workers on this table. Could you quieten down please. How are you going here boys. Excellent. Wow. Well done. Some people decided to do their look-cover-write-check straight away.

Towards the end of the same lesson

Teacher — Oh let's see what's happening over here. How are you going Bruno? Right nearly recess. I don't think you've got it done - you might not be allowed to go. Right Allan let's see how you're going. [Child complains of noise and a headache.] It's very noisy in here. Obviously people are not really working. If I have seen you really concentrating this morning then you might be able to go out, but if I haven't seen you concentrating then when the bell goes you can stay in and do your work.

The teacher's voice-over did a number of things. It named groups of children, 'tables', who were on task and organised. Individual children who were not 'on task' were encouraged with 'Come on Kirsty and Leona', again reminiscent of a sports coach enthusing team members to play harder, run faster. The voice-over also reminded children of time limits. It reminded children that the teacher would be there to check what they were doing. It reminded children of the teacher's desire for them all to be 'great workers'. It reminded children to be quieter. It reminded them of task options for early finishers (look, cover, write, check). It reminded them of the consequences of not getting things done, such as losing their recess time. It reminded them of the need to concentrate. In this classroom the voice-over lets the children know where their teacher is and what they should be like: quiet, organised, concentrating, on task, self-directed, great workers. Such people would be rewarded with recess time. Non-conformers would 'stay in and do your work'. Punitive consequences are spelt out. Surveillance is maintained. The proper student subject is identified, described and promised reward.

The teachers prided themselves on their own individualistic approaches to teaching. Indeed there were differences. However, the uniformity of their statements was striking. The construction of the literate student subject - from five year olds to thirteen year olds - was remarkably consistent across teachers and classrooms. The formation of the sensibilities of self-regulating workers was put in place from the earliest days of primary school and evident across the grade levels. The students themselves must shape their behaviours in line with the hypothetical ideal student.

How is the ideal student subject addressed and named during episodes of voice-over? In one classroom young students (five to seven year olds) were described in the following ways.

- 'some lovely quiet workers'
- 'busy beavers'
- 'great workers'
- 'on task table'
- 'girls talk the most'
- 'chatterbox table'
- 'best workers'
- 'a lovely worker'
- 'nice and quiet'
- 'some very hard workers here'
- 'researchers is what you're called'
- 'the quiet workers'
- 'hard working people in the Sunshine Room not kangaroos'
- 'the noisy table'
- 'the chatterbox table'
- 'Melinda finishes again - Speedy Gonzales'

For the most part, with the exception of students as 'researchers', they are constructed as workers. An essential characteristic of workers is being quiet. An implied characteristic is sitting still, 'not jumping around like kangaroos'. Also suggested in the voice-over is the judgement and comparison of workers or groups of workers - girls talk *the most*, these can be *the best* workers, *the noisy* table, *always the first* to finish, Speedy Gonzales. In these statements the teacher's monitoring, categorising and differential naming of students is publicly announced. Students are also singled out as exceptions for negative evaluation 'apart from Robin who was playing with his chatterbox', making them targets for peer criticism for not working in the collective interest of the group.

The present tense narration of the classroom lifeworld constructs the school student. It provides the collective student body with scripts for working, listening, reading, sitting and so on. It could be assumed that students ignore the teacher's ongoing patter as just the same old thing – that this kind of talk does not have effects. Yet, in some ways students are a most captive audience at this point, in their own places at their desks with their own 'work' in front of them, rather than a student body grouped together on the mat. Here their individualised placement in the classroom space positions them as vulnerable, as open to individualised checking.

Teacher voice-over congratulates the hard-working, quiet, on task students and simultaneously reminds all students of these norms. Voice-over also reminds students about reducing noise. In addition specific literacy behaviours are reinforced, such as the need to check spellings and refer to previous material. The teachers' voice can be seen as a oral reminder of the teachers' presence. It lets students know that the teacher is there - ever watchful and aware of student misdemeanours and transgressions, conformity and achievements. Teacher voice-over then is a reminder of the continual surveillance to which each student is subjected and for which each teacher is responsible. As a disciplinary practice, voice-over defines and articulates, through repetition, the classroom norms. It overrides all other classroom activity to tell students once again who they are, who they can be and how they should be.

Pep talks: A reminder of who you should be

Along with voice-over, the teachers gave what I describe as, 'pep talks'. Usually the pep talk began as a teacher monologue, but student participants were sometimes asked to contribute on the teacher's theme. On some occasions the 'pep talk' seems to have been brought on by student transgressions from classroom rules or teacher expectations. On other occasions, however, such talks seem to have been a response to students' following the rules and displaying the kinds of standards and behaviour the teacher is looking for. Sometimes it is simply the beginning of the day and the teacher begins with a 'motivational' speech.

The pep talks I observed lasted from a minute to ten minutes. On these occasions the teacher lays out expectations for behaviour, standards, ways of being a student and responsibilities. Teachers may return to the same theme later in the lesson or follow up a pep talk with voice-over and patrol. In this form of teacher talk the student is publicly constructed as an ethical subject. The 'pep talk' should not be seen simply as a punitive lecture for naughty students. It has positive and productive effects.

Teacher	OK. Can I just have stillness and eye contact. Some people have cleaned up beautifully. Adam I asked you for stillness and eye contact and that's what I expect. There's not one rule for you and one rule for everybody else. Do you understand that? OK. Um, we haven't done reading journals for about a week. Um I'll talk, I'll just talk about the expectations about reading journals. I'm going to give you your words. Um I want you to do the title, an illustration and if you would like something about that book, whatever you want to do about that book. Now I'm going to be seeing, watching today to see if you can actually make a comment about that book on your own wishes, not what I've asked. Whether you choose to write about the story. I'm waiting for stillness from some people, whether you choose to write some of the new words, whether you choose to write something out of the book, like the artist. Listen carefully, whether you choose to write about what you think about the book. It's up to you and that's what we're going to be looking for when V (parent) and I come around for hearing reading. I hope to hear this table and this table read today. Tomorrow that table and V(parent) we can probably get through those tables. OK Now I also expect a quiet level of working. That's out of consideration for others and out of being on task and I'm going to crack down very very very [said loudly] hard on people who choose to step outside that expectation. Is that understood?
Children	Yes Mrs. [teacher's name].
Teacher	What do I mean by that expectation about quiet working Larry?

Larry	Um.
Teacher	Adam I asked you to be, to do what we asked. Fold your fingers and have eye contact. Do it.
Larry	...(inaudible)... and sitting in our seats.
Teacher	Right, because when we're nattering away and wandering around like Brown's cows we don't get our work done. OK. We've only got half an hour to complete this task. It is now ten past nine, by twenty to ten we will be winding up and coming down ready to look at one of our other fascinating facts.

In this pep talk the teacher states her expectations for listening behaviour, reading journal entries and how students must work. Initially her approach could be seen as similar to that of the teacher described by Edelsky et al. (1983) in that the teacher explicitly reminds students of the ground-rules which have been negotiated and lays out her expectations for the tasks at hand. First off the teacher tells students how they must listen - 'stillness and eye contact'. A student who does not immediately comply is singled out and the teacher repeats her expectation, this time referring to it as a rule. The teacher continues her theme of expectations this time in reference to the reading journal. She outlines what must be done: the title, the illustration and 'something about the book'. She goes on to explain what that might be. Here her discourse shifts from rules, expectations and requirements, to the progressive discourse allowing for student choice. Students must make a comment, but what kind of comment they make is up to them. However, she warns that she will be checking what the students decide. Choice is framed as selection between task options that the teacher can and will check. In her introductory statements behaviour and academic work are addressed together within a regime of rules and expectations.

Anticipating different proficiencies, the teacher ensures there is an option for the range of student development, from commenting on the text, to copying out new words, to writing something out of the book, to writing what you think about the book. The student listeners are expected to hear and select the developmental option that fits them. After directing the parent helper, she returns to her expectations for student behaviour. She warns that she will 'crack down very very very hard' on people who step outside her expectation 'for a quiet level of working'. She calls on a child collaborator to translate for his peers what she has just said. Before Larry can answer, Adam transgresses again and is corrected instantly, thus demonstrating for his peers how failure to meet the teacher's expectations will be dealt with summarily. Larry finishes his answer, on which the teacher elaborates. Nattering and wandering around will not help them get their work done in time.

The pep talk provides an official reminder of how a student should be - responsible - both for academic work and for fellow students. The student's behaviour becomes a moral issue. The teacher begins her second scolding of Adam with the statement, 'I asked you to be', then stops and continues with the reframed demand 'to do what we asked. Fold your fingers and have eye contact. Do it.' While the teacher cannot directly ask Adam 'to be' anything, she can work on his actions, his observable behaviours, where he puts his hands and how and where he directs his vision. These are reasonable demands within an ensemble of behaviour management discourses which exhort teachers to be explicit about the behaviours they require. Such imperatives also exemplify how action upon the action of others, what Foucault

(1983) describes as 'government', happens in the moment by moment practices of institutions. In pep talks such as this, the school literacy lesson becomes the site of normalising practices, even as the teacher simultaneously deploys a progressive discourse of choice.

Calls for a particular repertoire of student behaviours were made throughout the literacy lesson, though not always at such length. Teachers referred to these talks on other occasions: 'Remember when we talked about'. The literacy event takes place in an ethical milieu which is produced not only by the teacher's pedagogical approach around literacy. Teacher talk, in this location, drew on religious, moral, psychological and educational discourses and produced the literate student as an ensemble of subjectivities. The teacher voice-over and pep talks provide scripts, spelling out criteria by which self-reflective students might judge themselves - 'grids of specification' by which the student 'deep down inside' will come to know him or herself.

The formation of the literate student in this disadvantaged school involved the production of an ethical subject which requires the deployment of an ensemble of pedagogical discourses and practices. The disadvantaged child is transformed in the literacy classroom. Students are trained to plan and manage work within set deadlines, to take responsibility for themselves, their noise, their workspace, their peers. Students will feel good about themselves when they achieve these things.

None of this is surprising. It is school after all! What is interesting is the multiple construction of the self-disciplined student subject within the progressive discourses of choice, child development, and personal response, with the contradictory educational discourse of behaviour management, and the adjacent work discourse, all of which come together in this local site at this time to produce the child subject, indeed to transform the disadvantaged child to the productive self-regulating litèrate school student. The literacy lesson becomes a site for the shaping of desired social practices and hence the production of particular kinds of young people. The pep talk becomes the vehicle for teachers to portray the ideal student. When the teacher talks in this way an ethical subject is constituted a norm against which students are required to examine their own behaviour.

On patrol: Surveillance of the individual

While on patrol teachers either physically move around the classroom or visually scan the class checking what individual students are doing. How teachers patrolled varied somewhat from teacher to teacher and how the classroom was physically organised in terms of tables. Some teachers patrolled often and with verbal commentary that could heard by everyone. Some teachers sat down next to a student and checked their work. Others simply moved from table to table; others checked at a distance what was going on. One teacher often approached students silently and then leaned over them from behind in order to check their work. She placed one arm over either shoulder and read or corrected the child's writing from this position, talking to them as she did it. In this particular classroom I observed students looking around the room as they worked in order to check where the teacher was. Usually however instances of teacher patrol were accompanied by verbal warnings of the teacher's imminent presence, such as the examples listed below, taken from each of the four classrooms.

- Oh let's see what's happening over here. How are you going Bruno?
- Jasmine. Remember quieter voice. I'm going to come and see how much you've done.
- OK. Let's see who's started. Come on Leona.
- What did I ask you to do, Rosie, Anne?
- Adam have you started work? Would you please?
- Adrianna ten centimetre voice please.
- Right I'm coming around to see what people are doing.
- Adrianna are you on task?
- Carlo, can I see?
- Tran do you have a problem?
- Where's today's recordings? Where's the date? What have you been doing while I have been talking to Angela?
- You're going to run out of time Jessie.
- So Sophie what have you done?
- How is that singing helping you to achieve your goals?

Statements made to students by the patrolling teacher echo the themes already discussed for voice-over and pep talks, the difference being the clearly individualised and targeted nature of the comment. These themes include being on task, using a quiet voice, getting a lot done, starting straight away, achieving goals. Occasionally positive feedback is directed at specific students, but usually teachers' comments identified deviations from the required literacy behaviour. At this time teacher examined the student against the classroom norms she worked to produce.

My interest is in what the teacher sees as transgressions in literacy lessons and what this implies for the student subject. Teachers on patrol were engaged in surveillance of the individual student, their use of space and time, their productivity, the positioning of their bodies and their literate practices. Referring to several examples, I show how this works to define and regulate the classroom norms.

Teacher Geoff get rid of that please. I don't ever want to see it inside again. It's turning into a playroom.

Teachers made many comments about the classroom as a workspace. Here a student is asked to remove a toy from his desk. Having toys in the classroom, even if simply on the desk, is an affront to the managerial discourse which has students as workers and classrooms as work environments. Toys are barred from the classroom, lest they turn it into a 'play room'. The progressivist discourses which encouraged children to bring objects from home to show, talk about and perhaps to write about is denied on this and many other occasions. There is no free play in this classroom and only rare and limited sessions of show and tell even in the younger classes. I have no wish to advocate a return to these practices; I simply observe the change in the discursive construction of the child subject.

Teacher Kylie, this is not a tray, it's a wardrobe.

Students had trays where they kept their school books and stationery. Periodically or when things were lost the teacher allowed time for students to clean out and organise their trays. On this occasion the teacher observes as Kylie cleans out her tray during

the literacy lesson. In the process several items of clothing are found in amongst her school things, which leads to the teacher's comment. While her comment could be heard as facetious it is just one of a litany of similar remarks about the work environment, the removal of baseball caps ('Take your hat off Charley. That can affect eye contact.'), about concern for property and using the right books. Managing one's tray is a part of proper studentship. Clothes and fashion items, a key interest of Kylie's and her peers are not the business of the classroom. These items of personal property make the tray, not a tray but a wardrobe. How the student uses property and space assigned to them by the school, such as the tray becomes an object of surveillance.

The teacher's monitoring of the classroom space can be seen as part of the whole school emphasis, triggered by the principal, on cleaning up the school environment, including the banning of graffiti from students' books, the removal of rubbish from the yard. New rules for what can be brought in to the classroom space discipline the student subject. Objects from home, such as toys or fashion items which may be related to student identity or popular culture have no place in the official classroom world.

Students' use of time was seen as directly related to their productivity. Teachers on patrol regularly asked students to account for themselves by showing their books. Lack of writing was taken as an indicator of wasted time.

Teacher	Where's today's recordings? Where's the date? What have you been doing while I've been talking to Angela?

One of the most common forms of checks on students was in terms of the amount of work they had produced during a given period. If students cannot produce 'the goods' to show the teacher they are judged as having wasted time. Teachers on patrol have a similar function to a workshop supervisor in checking the output of the workers. The student output which is valued in the language classroom is writing. On this occasion the non-productive student is asked to account for her time. This form of questioning forces the deviant student to confess to their misdemeanours, and of all crimes in the language classroom, non-productivity is the worst.

Much teacher surveillance is done on the basis of where and how children place their bodies (Luke 1992; Kamler et al 1994). Schools, along with other disciplinary institutions construct norms for holding and positioning the body (Foucault 1979). Across the different literacy events the teacher observer makes judgements about whether the student is properly engaged with the task on the basis of 'reading the student's body'. Teachers became vigilant observers of their students.

Teacher	Adrianna are you on task?
Adrianna:	Yes
Teacher	Actually your head was not down. On task behaviour when you are writing usually means having your head down.

In checking whether Adrianna is on task, the teacher explains how the body should be positioned for on task writing behaviour. A working student looks a particular way, is physically oriented to the desk in order to write. This interpretation of student

behaviour again contrasts sharply with progressive whole language discourse. From a whole language perspective teachers were encouraged to view behaviours such as pauses, chatting with friends as reasonable, perhaps as evidence of rehearsal. Teachers were not to assume that simply because the child wasn't holding the pencil that no writing was going on. However on this occasion, the teacher interprets Adrianna's body as off task. Students are expected to use the time to produce and to do it as quickly as possible. When the student is constituted as worker, rather than as a developing language user, and the classroom as workplace, new rules apply.

Contested subjectivities: Making 'spaces of freedom'?

Wherever power is exercised, argues Foucault (1978), there is resistance. In the classroom power relations are dynamic and continually renegotiated (Gore 1993; Walkerdine 1989). Students may work strategically, deploying other systems of domination such as gender relations (Walkerdine 1989). There can be no easy assumptions about teachers' control or power over students. While their employment within the institution invests teachers with 'pedagogic authority' the everyday relations of power are contingent upon the relationships constructed between teachers and students (Green 1998).

At this school, teachers worked hard to make the space and time for literacy teaching. In some cases, according to the teachers, this required training students in new regimes of self-regulation and order. However, the emphasis on productivity, goal-setting, quality, time management and self assessment was not uncontested by teachers or students. Normalising and disciplinary practices in literacy lessons discursively construct the well-behaved, hard-working self-regulating student as the ideal product of teachers' work. The dominance of this discourse – the 'new literate worker' – did not mean that were no other available ways for teachers or students to be. Subjectivity is multiple and contradictory. While teachers' discursive practices repeated these themes through techniques of voice-over, pep talks and patrols, both teachers and students disrupted this new regime of managerial discourses and practices which threatened to limit who they could be as teachers and as students and to constrain the pedagogical relationships they formed.

Disruptions to the disciplinary regime were of different kinds. Students exhibited predictable forms of resistance and misbehaviour; but what was also interesting were the ways in which some students actually contested the teachers' professional discourse. These disruptions were not of the ad hoc ' I don't want-to-be-here' variety, but rather indicated a conscious engagement, and at times a sophisticated analysis, of the forms of school literacies and pedagogies being constructed. Such contests not only undermined at least temporarily teacher authority, but also constituted threats to the teacher subject under construction. In daring to interrogate the teachers' professional discourse, the students strike at the teachers' very representational and knowledge resources.

In the senior classroom, student resistance of the teacher's authority and resistance to disciplinary practices was most obvious, especially early in the school year. Here an articulate group of students used a number of strategies to resist their teacher's systems. The discussion below occurs early in the morning. The teacher has just completed the roll, lunch orders, messages and so on and is ready to get into the lesson.

Teacher	This morning before we get into the rest of the workshop...
Mark	Workshop? [Interrupting the teacher who has turned to write on the blackboard '1. 1. Did I achieve my goal? 2. Why/ Why not 2. Set Today's Goal 3. Cartoon' (Text on blackboard)]
Mark	Why have you got '1 1 2 2 3' ?
Teacher	[Teacher explains her numbering system for the different tasks] Simple. Is that OK? Anyone got problems with that?

Only several minutes into the lesson the teacher has already been challenged twice by Mark. In this lesson he takes the teacher on directly in disputing her professional discourse and her numbering of the text she has written on the board. The teacher does not respond to his first comment, but explains her logic for the blackboard numbering. She concludes her explanation with a comment: 'Simple' and asks if anyone has a problem with that. This comment constructs Mark as the one with the difficulty rather than herself.

In this short exchange both Mark and his teacher attempt to exercise power over one another and in so doing the rest of the class. Mark disrupts the lesson flow and questions the teacher's authority and competence. The teacher works even harder to keep the lesson going and to construct Mark's behaviour as problematic in front of his peers. The teacher continues to explain the tasks for the lesson, writing a self-assessment of yesterday's goals, writing today's goals and discussing a cartoon which she has copied for them. When the students go back to their desks a ripple of questions goes around the room: Which book do we have to do this in? What do we do first? What do we do with the cartoon? As the teacher explains that they do tasks one and two in their self evaluation book a number of students, including Mark, Tran, Tatiana, Sophie, and Julia are chanting 'self evaluation' over and over so that it can be heard by other students around them. The teacher may not hear as she continues her explanation about the tasks and then apologises for not telling them what goes in their self evaluation book and what goes in journal. The teacher is patient and takes all questions seriously.

She then begins to patrol the room to check how different students are progressing on the tasks. As she passes one desk she picks up a piece of paper from the floor near Julia. Before the teacher says anything Julia comments critically, 'That's my book mark'. The teacher offers her a piece of coloured paper to make a new one. It seems as though everything the teacher does is the subject of criticism. As I sit at the tables with the children I hear their complaints about the task, said loud enough for the teacher to hear as she passes by.

Damien	I forgot what I have to do.
Tatiana	Where do you stick this? I don't like this. Do we have to do this? There's not enough time. [Tatiana starts to talk to Mark about international test cricket]
Teacher	Right you've got ten minutes left. [There is a rush at this announcement and many audible groans except for Mark and Tatiana who continue to discuss the cricket.]

Tatiana is an able and articulate student and her reluctance here does not indicate a difficulty with academic work. She is part of a group of students who actively resist what is asked of them by their teacher. This group of children from diverse cultures and language communities form alliances and contest the teacher's educational discourse and practices through direct questions, criticism and by continuing to talk about out of school subjects which interest them and connect them with each other, including cricket, video games and popular songs. As the teacher approaches the table with bundles of newspapers and magazines, Tatiana asks for an explanation. As she does so, the other students at the table continue to talk about other topics.

Tatiana	What's newspapers and stuff got to do with language workshops?
Teacher	'Cos we're going to look at some punctuation. [Julia asks to read words in my writing and asks me to help her with the cartoon and what it means. She says that she finds it difficult to get the point of the poem. Joel and Damien and Benjamith talk about BMX bikes and SEGA.]
Joel	Copying disks is very illegal.
Julia	I want some story writing time. [Julia starts to sing a pop song.]

The struggle for power in this classroom continued. As the teacher prepares the materials for the next task a student is already alert and obstructive. Taking on the teacher's discourse she asks about the relevance of 'newspapers and stuff' to 'language workshop'. The teacher continues to answer the substantive content of the question and shows no signs of being intimidated by the continual questioning of her competence, although her comments in interview indicated that she was extremely unsettled by her experiences with this class in the early weeks of school. In her presence and mine the students continue to talk about topics not related to the task at hand and to make comments about the nature of the lesson. For example, Julia states that she wants 'some story writing time', when no one responds, she begins to sing a pop song.

These students give their new teacher very cool treatment; further they do so conscious of my presence and my research focus about literacy. As the teacher gathers them together on the mat again to discuss the next task, investigating how punctuation is used in different texts, the principal arrives to explain how library time will work. A number of students ask if they can go with her then and there, just one more affront to their teacher. The lesson proceeds however with all the children remaining, the teacher pushing on with the next task. She finishes explaining what they are to do.

Teacher	Do you all understand the task?
Students	Yeeesss [Drawn out and exaggerated]

As the students return again to their tables to work in groups the teacher writes the instructions for the task on the board so that students can refer to it later. Back at her desk Tatiana is ever vigilant and says loudly enough for the students at her table and for me to hear, 'What is that? Write so that we can actually understand it.'

These challenges in the early weeks of the school year occur as the teacher tries to construct a working relationship with the students. It is at this point where student

strategies for resistance to the teacher's exercise of power are highlighted. In these early weeks the ground-rules and values are contested material as students and teacher negotiate a new deal (see also Edelsky et al. 1983; Kamler et al. 1994). In this class, students used a range of strategies to dispute the teacher's professional expertise as a literacy educator, targeting her vocabulary, the logic of blackboard notes, the task, the time for the task, the relevance of tasks, the genres, her interactive style and her handwriting. However their resistance should not be seen as simply a personal response to the new teacher. They resist the teacher's regime for them as students and they contest the formation of literacy produced by the literacy program.

Students contest the 'language workshop', its name, its content and its process. Their statements and questions indicate that self evaluations, journal entries, studies of punctuation, discussing cartoons are not the kinds of activities they want to do in language workshop. 'Story writing time', mentioned by Julia, was a common request. Thus the students work against the version of literacy their teacher offers them. In broad terms the teacher seeks to formalise the literacy lesson by naming it 'language workshop'; she plans phases of activity within the two hour period with time limits; she requires that students plan and self evaluate on a daily basis; she sets explicit tasks with immediate consequences.

In these early lessons we see her attempting to put into place what she describes as 'that kind of working mode'. As she organises students' time, place and activity within the language workshop the literacy lesson becomes a site of disciplinary practice. These students resist the managerial discourse by continuing to talk about cricket, computer software, BMX bikes and singing pop songs, by not meeting deadlines, by questioning her pedagogic authority and curriculum competence and by mocking her professional discourse.

Yet this teacher continued to employ pedagogical techniques with which the students were initially unfamiliar. She continued to answer their questions and take their challenges seriously. When she believed that she could trust students to work and to follow her rules, she began to open up the time and space of the literacy classroom to students' agendas and suggestions. At the same time she maintained her attention to productivity, correctness and to the unpopular self evaluation. She continuously required that students performed in ways of which she believed they 'could be proud'. For their part these students continued to view their teacher with some scepticism and they continued to question her professional decisions. Yet they began to deliver the written work to the 'standard' their teacher required and to initiate with enthusiasm projects which they could do as a class. When she was seconded to another position in the middle of the year they overtly expressed their feelings of disappointment at her leaving. Having taken on her goals and aspirations after considerable and ongoing struggle, they were less than accommodating with her replacement teacher.

In addition to these disruptions, which were clearly about the negotiation of power between the students and the teachers, the teachers, on occasions also disrupted the everyday disciplinary practices they had worked so hard to establish. They did this in a number of predictable ways, sometimes capitalising on unexpected alternatives brought about by visitors for instance, sometimes abandoning their plans and letting the children run in the yard, work in the garden, have a discussion or even have 'free time'.

One teacher made everyday school and classroom problems and mundane routines – such as peer fights and violence, teacher stress and workload – the object of study in her literacy lessons, even to the point of co-authoring humorous texts and role-plays around such matters. This teacher also regularly teased and played tricks on and with members of her class and they reciprocated. For instance the teacher jointly constructed big books (for shared reading) with the children on topics such as *Peace in Sunshine Room* and *Trouble in Sunshine Room*. These books dealt head-on and in a humorous way with children's fights, the noise and busy-ness of classroom life and teacher burn-out. The teacher regularly read these books with the children and on one occasion involved the school principal in a spontaneous role-play of a scenario from the book, which resulted in the teacher going to the staff-room for a rest, while the principal took over her class. In this way the teacher and the children were able to 'have a laugh', at the expense of the teacher, the principal and indeed the way things are in school.

My observations in this classroom indicated a classroom ethos where pleasure and fun were permitted. Students became well tuned to the teacher's 'playful' signals. Her use of humour positioned students as co-conspirators in a series of tricks and jokes. Initiating such play was not restricted only to the teacher. Students reciprocated - trying to stall lessons through 'one more song', swapping cassette tapes whilst the teacher was not looking. Thus through humour, the discursive construction of the normalised and disciplined student and teacher was interrupted. A space was made for other kinds of student identities, limited still to this play time, but nevertheless a space. Here teachers and students, through different kinds of language and literate practices changed the landscape of mundane school behaviours and discursive practices, even if briefly. On these occasions teachers explored a 'permeable curriculum' (Dyson 1993) made a 'third space', (Gutierrez et al. 1995) where the exercise of power within the school was disrupted.

These instances may seem rather trite. Yet on these brief occasions taken for granted school practices and roles are called into question. Being able to joke about these otherwise very serious matters contributed to a classroom ethos where literacy lessons became sites of pleasure. There was lots of laughter in this classroom. Often the audio tapes were difficult to transcribe due to the noise of children's laughing. This was unusual. There were few instances of laughing in other rooms in language lessons. While discourse analysis is extremely useful in demonstrating how power is exercised in classrooms it is more difficult to employ this approach in showing how teachers and students positively employ humour to disrupt disciplinary practices.

As Ball (1998) has recently noted, the shift to a performative educational discourse means that 'the act of teaching and the subjectivity of the teacher are both profoundly changed by this overdetermining panopticism'. Signs of increased self-monitoring and curriculum and pedagogical narrowing were already evident in the early nineties in these classrooms. Making space for teachers and children involved resisting the managerial discourses to which both were subjected, and it was not easy. Teachers felt that there was little room to move and little time to waste. The pressure to produce well-behaved literate students was even more overwhelming in a school context where many of the children spoke English as a second language and where supplemental home educational resources (material, social and educational) were

limited by poverty. Teachers disciplined themselves in order to discipline students (King 1990). Yet it was often the occasions where teachers made space for other kinds of literacies where students 'worked best', such as humorous interludes, where attention to the text interpretation and production was heightened.

Theories and policies about schooling require that teachers do many things, but what teachers' work actually does is difficult to address through empirical investigations in classrooms. In the present study my questions concern what teachers' work - their talk, actions, writing, watching, touching, silences - does and how children are constituted as students in these sites. How does what happens in literacy lessons delimit who students can be? Teachers' everyday pedagogical practices are both constructed by and construct the school environments in which they and their students 'live'.

In particular localities and points in history certain ensembles of discursive and institutional practices are employed together and produce specific social effects. Teachers' work is the production of 'good students', however they might be defined at a specific historical moment or location. How was the 'ideal student' constituted in literacy lessons in this disadvantaged school at this time? In what ways do teachers' discursive and institutional practices produce student subjectivities and identities? Further, what are the effects of these practices?

In this disadvantaged school serving poor communities in the early nineties teachers worked on the production of hard-working, self-regulating, socially responsible, literate students. Indeed much teacher time in literacy lessons was devoted to disciplinary practices, focussed upon the student as an ethical subject. They scrutinised students' use of time, talk, work habits, bodily attitudes and whether they infringed on the rights of their peers. A key problem for teachers is to anticipate social and material effects. By employing a discourse of work alongside others, such as quality, behaviour management, social justice and critical literacy what is produced and how can teachers predict the consequences? What is needed are ways of analysing the consequences of discursive and pedagogical practices.

One thing we can be sure of is that literacy can be alienating if teachers ignore students' subjectivities, subjectivities which are different from their teachers (Brodkey 1992).

> I can think of no more important project for teachers and researchers than studying classroom discursive practices in relation to the part they play in alienating students from literacy by failing to articulate their students' representations of themselves as subjects different from their teachers. (Brodkey 1992, p.315)

And in the examples of student resistance discussed above, we can begin to see evidence of how such alienation may be manifest, and ironically involving their refusal of the supposedly empowering literacies on offer. In interview, one teacher expressed extreme dissatisfaction with the way her job as a teacher appeared to be changing, despite her best intentions. Exasperated, she concluded, 'This is not what I set out to do'. Referring to the time she spent in managing students' behaviour, she discussed her hopes for teaching and how her goals were swallowed by the mundane and the trivial. It may be that in studying the everyday mundane routine practices of school life that hints for change and action are located, because it is in such events that power relations are maintained.

The grand plans for empowerment through literacy become buried beneath the lunch orders, the threats of time out for misbehaviour, the roll book the institutional practices of schooling which limit not only who students can be, but who their teachers can be. It may be that in studying the instances where teachers and students fight back and disrupt the disciplinary and normalising practices of schooling - 'the spaces of freedom we can still enjoy' (Foucault 1988, p.11) - that hints for local action may be germinated, for literacy teachers who are committed to making spaces for difference.

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FIGURE 1

The Advertiser

Prisoner escape row

Warders may be charged

School under siege

Tycoon's wife disliked Bond

DOWELL

ALL 1991 NEW FORDS MUST GO

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

FIGURE 2

School under siege as teachers 'crack'

Warders may be charged

Tragic end to family search

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FIGURE 3

Schools crisis: teachers to rally

Mr Falk calms kids with art

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FIGURE 4

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